

Library Report



Compiled by
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Library adjusts to the 'new normal'

Two months into its re-opening to the public, Western Counties Regional Library continues to adapt and deliver new services while working with the province to ensure public safety.

"Within the first few weeks of re-opening, we saw regulars and families come back," says Library Director Erin Comeau. "It is heartwarming to see people engaging in their regular library activities including bringing their children to the library to browse the shelves and to pick out books to bring home."

Overall, library clerks tell a similar story following the re-opening.

"The people who used the library for books are the ones who came most often when we first opened," says Darlene Gaudet, the senior library clerk at the Clare branch in Meteghan. "The numbers are down; however, the ones who use it are very thankful that we are open again."

The slow return of library users doesn't surprise Comeau.

"We expected our in-person visits to be lower than normal, and that is the case," she said, adding, "people are slowly coming back to the library and discovering that,

aside from there being less furniture and computers, not all that much has changed.

Gaudet echoes other library clerks stating, "We had a few people who came in saying, 'Thank God you're open!' Also, a few said, 'I couldn't wait another week for the library to open.'"

"We have had a few people do their happy dance coming through the lobby doors," adds Debbie Perry, senior library clerk at the McKay Memorial Library in Shelburne.

Library clerk Ruth Atkinson at the Clark's Harbour library and Mahala Sears at the Pubnico branch note how older adults were relieved to visit the library again.

"One elderly patron came into the library the second week we opened and she said she was so happy to be able to come to the library again," Atkinson says. "She said she was happy things were opening up again and she felt like living again!"

Sears says, "Our older patrons are very happy to have the library reopened and a place to get out of the house or to come have a short chat."

Branches re-opened, some with modified hours, to allow for more frequent disinfecting. People can browse for materials, request information, and use a computer for Internet access. There are fewer public computers available and time limits have been put in place to allow for proper cleaning after each use and for social distancing.

"People still come in to use the computers and printers and scanners," says Deputy Library Director Joanne Head. "They are reassured by our cleaning practices."

The library's contactless holds pickup service has proven popular, allowing people to request their books, movies or magazines and then pick them up in the lobby of their library off a special shelving unit.

"Everyone, for the most part, understands the need for the changes that have taken place," says Comeau.

For those who are still not comfortable visiting the library or those feeling too ill to visit, the library is still offering books-by-mail.

There continues to be no in-person programs or in-person events and program room bookings are being reviewed. The library hopes to have a safe method of providing in-person programming in place by late fall/early winter.



A library user picks up a reusable mask at the encased circulation desk at the Senator Ambrose H. Comeau Memorial Library in Meteghan.



Maria Wong, reserve Digby library clerk, provides masks to Debbie, Nicholas and Glendon.

PROGRAMMING ADAPTS

Over the summer, most library branches developed grab-and-go activities and programs.

"I have just had a patron come in that mentioned their children are loving our take-and-make kits," says Michelle Cook, senior library clerk at the Barrington Municipal Library. "So that is good news."

Cook and other clerks have enjoyed creating instructional videos and other online programming, giving them a chance to spread their creative wings and enhance their knowledge of digital programming.

The children and caregivers are "very excited about the grab-and-go bags and look forward to seeing what crafts and activities are available each week," says Atkinson.

At branches such as Westport, Lockeport, Barrington and Shelburne there are fewer visits from U.S. residents who own property in the region because of ongoing travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

"Our visits are less than the norm for a summer, as there are no U.S. summer residents," says Westport library clerk Jacqueline Journeay.

Continued on Page 2

Library works with government to distribute free masks

From Page 1

The library is working with the Nova Scotia government to offer people a limited number of reusable cloth masks. If you don't



Staff profile

Tenasitee Robbins

Delivery driver and Yarmouth library clerk Tenasitee Robbins may have just celebrated her fifth year of work at Western Counties Regional Library, but her attachment to the library is much deeper.

"I've always liked coming to the library, ever since I was a kid," Robbins says.

"I'm friends with (retired library clerk) Janet Miller, and she always had nice things to say about working here, so when I saw the job come up I knew I had to apply," she explains.

Fulfilling the role of delivery driver and library clerk, Robbins understands the geographical challenges the regional library faces while providing services to the people of Digby, Shelburne and Yarmouth counties.

"My most memorable moment would be the first time I had to travel to Westport in some not-so-nice weather," she says. "It is the first time I've ever had to ride a ferry when the waves were huge."

While visiting all of the branches provides some fond memories, she enjoys working in the Yarmouth library, getting to know the community and seeing familiar faces every week.

As for what lies ahead, Robbins believes the library's biggest challenge is getting used to the "new normal" that 2020 has brought with the COVID-19 pandemic.

That said she believes the library is "doing a great job so far."

have access to a non-medical mask you can get a reusable, cloth mask free of charge. Masks are available in both adult and youth sizes and are adjustable. Each person can request up to two masks for each member of their immediate family.

"We are working with the province to act as a distribution centre of non-medical masks and could possibly deliver similar necessary services if called upon," says Comeau of the partnership.

"I think it is a great role for the library to play on behalf of government because of our presence in so many communities."

The uptake by the public and by small businesses has been significant.

"There are a lot of masks going out," Gaudet says. "Here, the public have been very pleased with reusable masks."

"We've had a lot of seniors and folks who work with the public

come in to get masks," says Sears. "They have all been very happy and grateful to get them."

The interaction can also lead to some laughter.

"So how much do I owe you?" is a common question, and when they are told they are free, they are happily surprised," says Joanna Jarvis, senior library clerk at the Digby branch. "I had another person wearing it upside down. We had a good laugh."

A wide range of local businesses have stepped into for masks as

well.

This type of service is part of the new normal facing the library and the public, says Comeau.

"Given the likelihood that this pandemic will be with us for a while, I believe it is the regional library's role to continue to offer its core services as best as it can despite the challenges," she says. "It is in times like these when people turn to the library the most. We want to make sure that we are here to continue to meet their needs as best as we possibly can."

Modified Adopt-A-Book begins Sept. 8

A modified Adopt-A-Book campaign will run from Tuesday, Sept. 8 through Saturday, Oct. 31.

"Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt that it was necessary to delay our most important fundraiser, until things stabilized somewhat," says Public Relations Manager Ian White.

The fundraiser allows people to adopt (purchase for the library) books to put on their public library's shelves. All 10 branches will have books on display that are available to adopt and borrow right away.

People can adopt in person or online via westerncounties.ca. The goal is to have 750 books adopted, valued at approximately \$20,000.

AROUND THE BRANCHES

Headquarters



Public Relations Manager Ian White received his 15-year certificate from Library Director Erin Comeau on Feb. 4.

Bookkeeper Carol Surette, left, received her 20-year certificate from Deputy Library Director Joanne Head on March 27.

Library Director Erin Comeau marked her 15-year anniversary with the library on June 13.

Shannon Raynard has accepted the position of Training and Development Manager. Her start date is Sept. 14.

Lydia Hunsberger has accepted the position of Manager Collections and Digital Services. Her start date is Oct. 19.

Barrington

Library clerk Alison Banks received her five-year certificate of service on April 13.

Clare/Weymouth

Reserve library clerk Claire Robicheau received her five-year certificate of service on Aug. 17.

Weymouth

The program room received a fresh coat of paint, making the room look more inviting.

Westport

Commissioner Brian Bowerman stained the universal accessible ramp, the exit door stairs, and the main stairs and front deck in July.

Community member Jeff Thompson sanded and painted the flag pole.

Yarmouth



Library Director Erin Comeau, right, presents Yarmouth library clerk Carol Wing with her 5-year anniversary certificate on Dec. 3, 2019.

Deputy Library Director Joanne Head, right, presents Yarmouth library clerk and delivery driver Tenasitee Robbins with her 5-year anniversary certificate on July 13.